

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 MCT-01 SY-05 OC-06 CIAE-00 COME-00
EB-07 INR-07 LAB-04 NSAE-00 SIL-01 CCO-00 DODE-00
PM-04 H-01 L-03 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 NEAE-00 /080 W
-----131236Z 028883 /23 10

P R 131140Z JAN 77
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6539
INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMCONSUL MADRAS
AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
CINCPAC
COMIPAC

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD: COMIPAC FOR IC AND 1225

E.O. 11652:N/A
TAGS: PINT, ELAB, CE
SUBJECT: STRIKE EASES SLIGHTLY

REF: COLOMBO 0144

1. SUMMARY: SOME WORKERS ARE STRAGGLING BACK TO WORK AND
BUS SERVICES HAVE IMPROVED. THE RAIL STRIKE, WHICH BEGAN THE
WHOLE AFFAIR, REMAINS RELATIVELY EFFECTIVE. OPPOSITION
LEADERS CALLED FOR NEGOTIATIONS BUT THE GOVERNMENT MAY NOW
BE CONFIDENT THAT IT CAN SIMPLY WAIT OUT THE REMAINING
STRIKERS. END SUMMARY.

2. THE RASH OF STRIKES THAT HAVE BEEN PLAGUING SRI LANKA
MAY NOW BE FALTERING. SOME WHO HAVE BEEN OFF THE JOB ARE
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NOW STRAGGLING BACK TO WORK, AS GOVERNMENT SPOKESMEN
CONTINUE TO WARN THAT NEW RECRUITS WILL BE HIRED TO
REPLACE STRIKERS. BUS SERVICE IN COLOMBO IS RETURNING
TO NEAR NORMAL LEVELS AS THE GOVERNMENT HAS REPORTEDLY
BROUGHT INTO SERVICE SUSPENDED BUS DRIVERS AND OTHERS
VOLUNTEERED BY A LOCAL INDUSTRIALIST BACKER OF THE
RULING PARTY (THE WELL-KNOW DASA MUDALALI). A BOMB

THROWN AT A BUS IN A COLOMBO SURURB JANUARY 12
INJURED THE DRIVER AND HAS MADE SOME PASSENGERS LEERY
OF RIDING THE BUSES; HOWEVER, WE HAVE HEARD OF NO
FURTHER VIOLENCE.

3. OTHER ESSENTIAL SERVICES REMAIN AS BEFORE ALTHOUGH
SLIGHTLY HIGHER ATTENDANCE IN OFFICES IS REPORTED.
GOVERNMENT CLERKS HAVE RETURNED IN MODERATE NUMBERS;
ENOUGH RAILWAY WORKERS ARE STILL OUT THAT THE TRAIN
SYSTEM IS ONLY BARELY OPERABLE. AN OFFICIAL SOURCE
IN THE MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT SAID THAT 14,000 OUT OF
27,000 RAILWAY WORKERS REPORTED ON THE JOB JANUARY
13 BUT HE ADMITTED THAT SERVICE WAS MUCH LIKE THE
PREVIOUS DAY--OCCASIONAL AND MINIMAL. IT IS THE
MINISTRY'S HOPE THAT SERVICE WILL BE BACK TO NEAR
NORMAL BY MONDAY , JANUARY 17. THAT APPEARS TO BE UNLIKELY.

4. A UNITED MEETING OF OPPOSITION PARLIAMENTARY
LEADERS WAS HELD JANUARY 12, AT WHICH A LETTER
WAS DRAFTED AND SENT TO THE PRIME MINISTER URGING THE
GOVERNMENT TO NEGOTIATE AND SETTLE THE STRIKE.
IN A JAB AT THE PM'S COALITION PARTNER, THE COMMUNIST
PARTY, AND ITS SUPPORT FOR THE STRIKE, THE OPPOSITION
LEADERS ASKED WHY A COMMUNIST MINISTER COULD SIT IN THE
CABINET DURING A DISCUSSION OF THE STRIKE WHEN THE
GOVERNMENT REFUSED TO MEET WITH STRIKERS. THE LETTER
TO THE PM ALSO CALLED FOR AN IMMEDIATE MEETING OF THE
NATIONAL STATE ASSEMBLY (NSA). THE NEXT SCHEDULED
MEETING OF THE NSA IS JANUARY 20 AND WE ARE
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TOLD THAT THE SESSION WILL BE HELD AS SCHEDULED, AND
NOT EARLIER.

5. TEA PLANTATIONS HAVE BEEN UNTOUCHED BY THE
LABOR UNREST. EVEN LEFTIST UNIONS HAVE NOT COME OUT
ON STRIKE, BECAUSE OF THE LACK OF SUPPORT FROM THE
DOMINANT CEYLON WORKERS CONGRESS, WHICH IS STAYING CLEAR
OF THE WHOLE AFFAIR. ITS FELLOW MEMBERS IN THE TRADE
UNION COORDINATING COMMITTEE, THE CEYLON MERCANTILE
UNION, WAS CONSIDERING A ONE-DAY TOKEN STRIKE OF THE
COLOMBO COMMERCIAL SECTOR BUT IT HAS NOW GIVEN UP OR
POSTPONED THAT IDEA IN DEFERENCE TO THE OPPOSITION
OF THE OTHER UNIONS WITH WHICH IT IS CONSULTING.

6. A NEW EMERGENCY REGULATIONS WAS GAZETTED BY THE PRESIDENT
JANUARY 11. THE REGULATION EMPOWERED THE POLICE TO
ARREST WITHOUT A WARRANT ANYONE WHO INCITES THOSE
EMPLOYED IN AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE SUCH PERSONS
CAN BE DETAINED FOR UP TO ONEMONTH WITHOUT BEING

PRODUCED BEFORE A MAGISTRATE.

7. FRIDAY, JANUARY 14 IS A HINDU FESTIVAL AND
NATIONAL HOLIDAY. SRI LANKANS WILL TAKE A BRIEF
RESPITE FROM THE CURRENT TURMOIL. THE EMBASSY EXPECTS
TO DO THE SAME; ANY URGENT MESSAGE FOR ATTENTION
BEFORE JANUARY 17 SHOULD BE NIAC IMMEDIATE.

8. COMMENT: WITH MORE AND MORE SIGNS THAT THE
GOVERNMENT NOW HAS THE UPPER HAND IN ITS STRUGGLE WITH
THE STRIKERS, THE PRIME MINISTER
MAY DECIDE TO WAIT OUT THE STRIKERS. THE GOVERNMENT
COULD INCREASE THE PRESSURE ON THEM BY CARRYING THROUGH ON ITS
THREAT TO HIRE NEW RECRUITS TO REPLACE ABSENTEES. END COMMENT.
REED

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: UNION GOVERNMENT RELATIONS, LABOR STRIKES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 13-Jan-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977COLOMB00170
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770013-0320
Format: TEL
From: COLOMBO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770156/aaaabwvm.tel
Line Count: 130
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 5a3f70da-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 COLOMBO 144
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 23-Feb-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3609216
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: STRIKE EASES SLIGHTLY
TAGS: PINT, ELAB, CE
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/5a3f70da-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009